

Unit 8b: Russian Orthodox Texts--- Societal Implications

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Russian Orthodox fusion of church/state/culture
- Reasons for the accommodation by the Russian Orthodox Church during years of Communist rule
- Communist state policies aimed at eliminating the church
- Often subservient role of the Russian Orthodox Church to the State
- Various factions within the Orthodox tradition
- Forms of anti-Semitism present in Russia
- Monastery restoration currently taking place
- Strong concern for the environment within Russia

Identify

- Anti-Semitism
- Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia
- Free Orthodox Church
- Cyril
- Methodius
- St. Herman
- St. Sergius
- Hesychast
- St. Philip
- St. Seraphim of Sarov
- Patriarch Alexis II
- Archbishop (later Patriarch) Tikhon
- Canonization
- Liturgy
- Saints
- Boris and Gleb

Realize

- Reasons for establishment of Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia
- Historic reputation, within orthodoxy, of anti-Semitism
- Rehabilitation efforts currently taking place for victims of Stalin's terror
- View, held by some, of orthodoxy being an impediment to societal change
- Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church pronouncements on societal issues within Russian Federation

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"For masses of ordinary Russians, especially those in rural areas, nationalism begins with love of country and reverence toward the Church."

-- Hedrick Smith, The New Russians, p. 394.

"The destructive course of events over the last decade has come about because the Government...has completely disregarded the country's creativity and particular character as well as Russia's centuries-old spiritual and social traditions. Only if those paths are freed up can Russia be delivered from its near-fatal condition."

--Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "What Kind of 'Democracy' is This?"

This unit focuses on Russian Orthodox thought and practice applied to society and politics within the Russian Federation. It addresses selected aspects of church/state relations, monastic communities, mission emphasis and saints. The final section treats church pronouncements and issues currently surfacing among clergy leaders.



1. Russian Orthodox Practice

Nathaniel Davis writes of this close alliance. *"The historical faith of Russia is Orthodoxy, and Orthodoxy is deeply embedded in the Russian soul. It defines a Russian's sense of nation, history and identity, even when the individual is not devout."* (A Long Walk to Church, pp. 222-223).

a. Church/state relations

(1) Overview While historic United States policy sees a clear and distinct line between church and state, other areas of the world often have no such clear demarcation.



Orthodoxy fuses together the two. To be religious is to be politically involved. Citizenship and church identity go hand in hand. Even if a person seldom attends divine services, yet holds to the orthodox faith, he or she consider themselves devoted followers and good citizens.

(2) Historical blend--church/state A review of Unit 2 (Historical Overview) and 3a (Russian Orthodox Religious History) amply shows the uneasy merger of Russian Orthodox and the Russian state throughout history. Less easily understood are the reasons for the accommodating stance taken by Russian Orthodoxy during the years of Communist rule.

(a) Motherland In an interview entitled "Will the Lord Help Us?," Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexis II responded to the question whether the Russian Orthodox Church had anything to repent of, considering its somewhat yielding stand with the Soviet Communist Party. Patriarch Alexis II referred back to words of Metropolitan Sergius, who in 1927 declared, *"We wish to be Orthodox and at the same time to realize that the Soviet Union is our civil motherland, whose joys and achievements are our joys and achievements, and whose failures are our failures"* (Igor Troyanovsky, Religion in the Soviet Republics, p. 75).

A fine point elaborated on by the Patriarch was Sergius' use of the term "motherland," a word prohibited by Communist authorities in the 1920s. It was the joys and sorrows of the motherland--not the atheistic government--that Sergius considered his own. Russian Orthodox leadership took the position that the structured church must continue during the era of Soviet rule, even if it has appeared she collaborated with the Communist party in the process.

(b) Loyalty and repentance Over the decades of Communist rule, Russian Orthodox Church leaders shielded its people, by declaring a tenuous loyalty to the Soviet government. Survival as an institution was at stake.



In this painful time, Patriarch Alexis II acknowledges that the church sinned by silence and untruth. Yet this sin was for the sake of rather than against the people that this silence was condoned. "And," says the Patriarch, "we have always done penance to God for that sin" (Troyanovsky, p. 75).

(3) Tragic history

(a) Grim times Metropolitan Tikhon (TEE-khahn), upon being informed of his election to the Patriarchy immediately after the 1917 October Revolution, looked to the future and commented that the election itself was "for me the scroll on which is inscribed 'lamentations and mourning and woe.' Many will be the tears I will have to swallow and the moans I will have to utter in the office of patriarch, especially in these grim times!'" (Troyanovsky, p. 73).

(b) Communist suppression During the period of Communist domination, state policies, aimed at eliminating the church, took the form of reprisals, organized propaganda, state intrusion on church leaders and administration of parishes. The result forced church influence out of society.

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Writes Hedrick Smith of the results of the siege of atheistic propaganda upon the church, "...it [the Church] was long relegated to tokenism, and left to babushkas, old women; to clerics; and to appearances at international peace conclaves, where its prelates [priests] proclaimed Soviet goodwill" (The New Russians, p. 395).



Activities became limited to Divine Services alone. State pressure on clergy weakened their power. Church material resources declined significantly.

(c) Meekness rather than confrontation

Patriarch Tikhon's approach accepted a subservient role of the Orthodox Church to the state. Rather than engage in armed or vocal confrontation, the church continued a practice rooted in its historic orthodox tradition. The first Russian saints, Boris and Gleb, sons of Prince Vladimir, took a "meek" approach, becoming martyrs for the faith. In a similar vein, the church under Communism accepted its fate as a "bitter cup" from the hands of God. Persecution became seen as God's "scorching and healing touch."

(4) Orthodox factions Due in part to the perception that Russian Orthodoxy made excessive compromises with state authority, break-away groups challenged the orthodox hierarchy. Currently, various Protestant groups experience a resurgence. Russian nationalists of the far right propose radical, often anti-Semitic, agendas. Within the orthodox tradition itself, the following two groups express this dissatisfaction with state approved orthodoxy.

(a) Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia This emigre group broke away from the Moscow Patriarchate in 1927 because of Church cooperation with Stalin and the Soviets.



It advocates a church/state relationship similar to that in place before the 1917 revolution. A return to Imperial Russia, and canonization of the last Czar, are two of the church platforms advocated by this exile orthodox body.

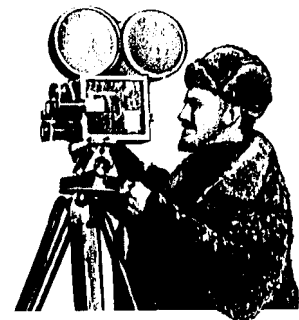
Now based in New York City, the Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia has no canonical relation with official orthodox patriarchies and churches.

(b) Free Orthodox Church Based in Suzdal (SOOZ-dahl), a city some 150 miles east of Moscow, the Free Orthodox consists of 15 churches, formerly members of the Moscow Patriarchate. Members of this group, many who were of the underground church during Communist times, single-handedly restored their church facilities, without the help of Moscow based Orthodox leadership. Free Orthodox now see the 1997 Orthodox Protection Law (which gives greater freedom to the Russian Orthodox Church) as a direct challenge to their authority and existence.

(5) Cultural heritage Russian Orthodoxy continues to be one of the most significant repositories of Russian culture. Some see the church as guardians of the beauty, truth and genuineness of Russian culture.

Says Vladimir Galitsky, an architect who restored Moscow's Church of the Archangel Michael, "*...when you look at this shrine [Archangel Michael's], it's beautiful. It's like the music of Beethoven or Bach*" (The New Russians, p. 397).

One Russian film director, Nikita Mikhaldov, describes the importance of the spiritual sphere within the current Russian Federation:



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"It is not economics but culture which has been the fundamental factor of life in Russia for centuries...And the basic culture in Russia was not etiquette--the ability to hold one's fork correctly and dress properly--but faith. The Orthodox faith." ("Auditing the Soul of Russia," Russian Life, Sep 1997, p. 13).

(6) Anti-Semitism Discrimination against Russian Jewish people, takes a variety of forms (see Unit 3b Non-Orthodox Religious History). As recently as 7 Nov 1998, Russian Communists in the lower house of Parliament, in seeking to blame someone for the economic morass current in the Russian Federation, identified Jewish peoples as likely candidates (see Michael Wines, "Anti-Semitism Rears Its Head in Parliament of Russia," New York Times, 8 Nov 1998).



According to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, anti-Semitic messages continue within portions of the Russian Orthodox Church. These expressions take a variety of forms.

- **Ancient themes** Some categorize all Jewish peoples as "Christ-killers." The mistaken belief that Jewish people everywhere are a conspiratorial body, intent on ruining and dominating humankind, is another form of this conceptual evil.
- **Invectives** Anti-Semitic talk in Russia, saying "zhids" or "kikes" have overtaken the country, or talk of America being run by Jewish people and controlled by the State of Israel are all too common anti-Semitic themes.

The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews also addresses the following as the "special problem of the Russian Orthodox Church."

(a) Reputation Within Orthodoxy, various factions have historically engaged in anti-Semitic practice. During the Communist era, KGB agents within the Church hierarchy sought to silence Father Gleb Yakunin, an often singular voice opposing anti-Semitism within the church.



The uneasy silence of church hierarchy, in the face of state sanctioned anti-Semitic laws and practices, added to this negative reputation.

(b) Words The Dorcas Aid International report on anti-Semitism (1995) reports that "*a considerable part of the Orthodox clergy still sees Jews as the enemies of Christianity...attacks against Jews from within the Church are seldom denounced...*" (see Abramowitz, "Anti-Semitism in the Former Soviet Union: an Overview," p. 2).

(7) Rehabilitation In 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev announced that victims of Stalin's terror, including church personnel, would be rehabilitated. A church commission sought to preserve the memory of these innocent victims. Owing to a "duty to conscience and morality," procedures to identify each victim, name by name, were set forth. These martyrs and confessors now receive places of honor within the Russian Orthodox Church.

(8) Impediment to change Harvard University Professor of History (Emeritus) Richard Pipes sees Russia's long road in becoming a civil society as due to the legacy of a Communist past, and that of the "*czars and their partner, the Orthodox Church, which for centuries collaborated in instilling in their subjects disrespect for law, submission to strong and willful authority, and hostility to the West.*" Dr. Pipes also sees the Russian Orthodox Church, which claims authority over all Orthodox Christians of the former Soviet Union, as a force pushing to

"reintegrate" the New Independent States back into Russia proper (See "Is Russia Still An Enemy?," Foreign Affairs, pp. 70-71).

b. Monasteries

(1) Overview Monks and nuns separate themselves from worldly concerns and devote their lives to contemplation and service of God. The strong Russian Orthodox monastic tradition allows each monastic community to set its own rules.

Both individual (hermits) and communal monastic forms are prevalent. A contemplative life of prayer and study for monks and nuns--rather than orders of service (like Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity)--is the orthodox aim.



(2) Renewal Restoration of old monasteries--many which were confiscated during the Soviet era--continues today. New monastic communities are forming. In addition, orders of the monastics, with the emphasis upon holiness, purity and selfless love, are receiving renewed significance.

(3) Societal reform One Russian Orthodox monastery trains people for secular professions. This Moscow based monastery houses the Russian Orthodox University of St. John the Theologian, a church-run university which trains young people for professional, rather than priestly vocations. Says rector Ioann Economtsev, *"My goal is to prepare the intellectual and spiritual elite of Russia...We are preparing students for a regenerated Russia, for a highly cultural, highly moral Russia of great intellectual and scientific potential."* (Marina Lakhman, "Russia's Church-Run Campus Has a Secular Goal," New York Times, 4 Jan 1998, p. 3.)



c. Missions

(1) Slav connection In the ninth century, the Greek brothers Cyril (SIHR-ahl) and Methodius (mah-THOO-dee-ahs) were instrumental in converting many Slavs to Orthodox Christianity. These brothers helped create the Glagolitic (glag-ah-LIHT-ihk) alphabet, a forerunner of Cyrillic. Historically, missionary activity received great emphasis in the orthodox tradition.

(2) North America ties In 1794, Russian monks settled on Kodiak Island as part of missionary expansion throughout Siberia. One of these monks, St. Herman (died 1837), defended the rights of native peoples against ruthless Russian traders. A diocese, created first in Alaska (1870) then San Francisco (1900), exercised jurisdiction over the North American continent. The future patriarch of Moscow, American Archbishop Tikhon, oversaw the San Francisco based diocese.

d. Saints Identified persons, who are treated with reverence and awe by means of a liturgy (a ritual of public worship), are saints. Canonization is the process whereby churches recognize which persons become such venerated individuals. Saints become models of the Christian life and are intercessors for the faithful's prayers. Shrines, which may hold the remains of saints (relics), are also held in high regard.

St. Sergius of Radonezh (1314-92) was a spiritual father of monastic renewal. St. Philip (Moscow metropolitan from 1566-68), condemned the excesses of Ivan IV. Metropolitan Philip was deposed and murdered as a result. St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833) revived the ancient monastic practices of the Hesychast (HES-ah-kast, [Mt. Athos, Greece]) tradition.

2. Church Pronouncements The following observations give a flavor of some societal issues currently set forth by members of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy.

a. Declaration of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, 3 April 1990

This statement, authored by church leadership, provides pastoral guidance to faithful Orthodox adherents, focusing especially upon matters contemporaneous with the break-up of the Soviet Union.



(1) Problems facing Russian society. The declaration outlines the following difficult challenges.

- **Spiritual renewal** Religious upbringing and training of children and youth is a particular focus
- **Cultural restoration** Monuments of Russian society, long destroyed or neglected, call for immediate plans to save them
- **Environment** Protection of the environment, in the face of "barbaric methods of economic management," is critical
- **Social restoration** The heartless attitude of so many--based upon faulty social and economic policies--needs renewed attention

(2) Revival Church parish renewal, establishing genuine community at the local level, is a major theme.

(3) Building preservation

Destruction of church buildings, and their continued decay is an ongoing concern. These *"sacred monuments to history and culture"* need restoration. Their renovation *"should become an act of national repentance and have an important spiritual, moral, and educational significance"* (Trojanovsky, p. 72).



b. Clergy in Parliament

In 1989, for the first time since the 1917 October Revolution, seven members of the clergy became elected members of the Soviet parliament. Issues raised by two Russian Orthodox leaders give indication of church social/spiritual concerns.

(1) Moral renewal

Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow and All Russia sees moral precepts as critical to bringing back alienated peoples who survived the Soviet society.

Tolerance of others, with kindness to the sick, needy, disabled, old and lonely, are necessary goals. Environmental care is critical because *"contemptuous abuse of nature is a clear sign of egoism and a sick soul"* (Trojanovsky, p. 46).

(2) Human dignity and social outreach

Metropolitan Pitirim sees concrete positive actions, toward nature, people and the material world, as expressions of personal moral potential. Reviving the human soul and uplifting human dignity come through restoring legitimate ties of people to their land. Says the metropolitan, *"The history of Russia is a never-ending story of people waging a courageous battle for their souls and morality in the face of external calamities"* (Trojanovsky, p. 47).

In addition, church education of the young, development of central Russia, monastery renewal, problems of soldiers (many of the Afghanistan veterans)

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and war invalids are also practical issues vying for attention.



"Send yourself flowers."

Vocabulary List: Russian Orthodox Texts-- Societal Implications

Alexis II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Current patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church

Anti-Semitism Overt and covert hostility to Jewish peoples

Boris and Gleb, Saints First Russian Orthodox Saints, sons of Vladimir. Rather than rise up in violence against their accusers, these early believers became humble martyrs for their faith.

Canonization Process whereby churches recognize which persons will become saints

Cyril and Methodius (SIHR-ahl, mah-THOO-dee-ahs, Saints) Two Orthodox missionaries instrumental in converting many Slavs to Christianity. They helped create the Glagolitic (glag-ah-LIHT-ihk) alphabet, a forerunner of Cyrillic.

Free Orthodox Church Small group of churches near Moscow who comprised an underground church during Soviet times but now lead a more open, though threatened by new laws, existence.

Herman, Saint (d. 1837) Orthodox monk in Kodiak Island area of Alaska defended the rights of native peoples against ruthless Russian traders

Hesychast (HES-ah-kast) Orthodox monastic practices found in monasteries in Mt. Athos, Greece

Liturgy Ritual of public worship

Philip, Saint (Moscow Metropolitan 1566-68) Orthodox leader who condemned the excesses of Ivan IV. Saint Philip was deposed and murdered as a result.

Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia Orthodox emigre groups which broke away from Moscow in part because of Church cooperation with Stalin and the Soviets

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Saints Persons identified by the church as spiritually unique individuals, who are then treated with reverence and awe by means of liturgy and church proclamation

Seraphim of Sarov, Saint (1759-1833) Orthodox leader who revived the ancient monastic practices of the Hesychast tradition

Sergius, Saint (1314-92) Spiritual father of monastic renewal in Russian Orthodoxy

Tikhon, Patriarch Russian Orthodox leader immediately after the October Revolution. At one time, Tikhon was the overseer of the San Francisco diocese.

Review Quiz: Russian Orthodox Church-- Societal Implications

Part 1--Fill in the Blanks Fill in the blanks with the most correct word immediately following this section. Not all words listed will be used.



The (1)_____ is a group of 15 churches that left the Moscow Patriarchate. These members of the churches rebuilt their facilities single-handedly. Many were members also of the underground church during Communist times.

Two Greek brothers, (2)_____, converted many Slavs to orthodoxy. These missionaries also developed a forerunner of the Cyrillic alphabet.

In the early 1900's, the future patriarch of Moscow, Archbishop (3)_____, oversaw the San Francisco diocese.

The process whereby churches recognize individuals as being eligible to become saints is called (4)_____. Of the many Russian Orthodox saints, St. (5)_____ was spiritual father to monastic renewal; St. (6)_____ revived ancient Hesychast monastic practices and St. (7)_____ condemned the excesses of Ivan IV. Philip was deposed and murdered as a result.

The first Russian Orthodox Saints, (8)_____, sons of Prince Vladimir, became martyrs of the faith rather than engaging

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in armed confrontation. Saint (9)_____, an early missionary monk in what is now Alaska, defended the rights of native people against ruthless Russian traders.

Many historians would agree that the historic faith of Russia is (10)_____.

Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia
Tikhon
Seraphim of Sarov
Philip
Sergius
Jude
MIG maneuverability
Boris and Gleb

Herman
Elmer and Jack
Free Orthodox Church
Cyril and Methodius
canonization
Orthodoxy



Part 2--Multiple Choice

Place the most correct response in the blank provided.

1. ____ For many Russians, _____ defines a sense of nationhood, history and identity.
 - a. motherland
 - b. orthodoxy
 - c. Mir
2. ____ During the Communist era, Russian Orthodox leadership chose to
 - a. speak out rigorously against the Communists, no matter what the outcome.
 - b. go underground.
 - c. endure as a structured church, even if it appeared that collaboration with the Communist party occurred.
3. ____ When Metropolitan Tikhon became patriarch after the 1917 October Revolution, his attitude in taking office is summed up by
 - a. "Let us march to victory against the Communist hordes."

- b. "Many will be the tears I will have to swallow."
 - c. "Live and let live."
4. ____ One of the reasons for factions arising within Russian Orthodoxy was the perception that
- a. church leadership made excessive compromises with Communist state authority during Soviet times.
 - b. many churches are better than one.
 - c. the 1997 Orthodox Protection Law would ensure smaller, non-state approved orthodoxy groups would survive.
5. ____ One Russian film director, Nikita Mikhaldov, sees the basic culture in Russia as
- a. the ability to appreciate ballet.
 - b. the ability to use the proper salad fork at dinner.
 - c. being the orthodox faith.
6. ____ Discrimination against Russian Jewish people, called _____, still persists in the Russian Federation and parts of the Russian Orthodox Church.
- a. anti-Semitism
 - b. brainwashing
 - c. Orthodox Protection Laws
7. ____ Mikhail Gorbachev's 1990 announcement focused on victims of _____ terror who would be rehabilitated and whose memory would be honored.
- a. Lenin's
 - b. Stalin's
 - c. Hitler's
8. ____ One of the Russian Orthodox Church's primary concerns with creation is
- a. protection of the environment.
 - b. animal rights.
 - c. ozone depletion from rockets in space.
9. ____ The restoration of destroyed and decaying church buildings is seen by the Declaration of the Holy Synod of 3 April 1990 as

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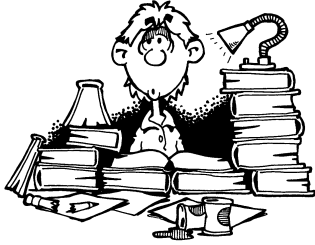
- a. an act of national repentance with important spiritual, moral, and educational significance.
- b. impossible in the present financially strapped economy.
- c. a state rather than church concern.

10. ____ Harvard history professor (Emeritus) Richard Pipes sees the Russian Orthodoxy Church as a force

- a. pushing reintegration of New Independent States back into Russia proper.
- b. advocating further independence for New Independent States.
- c. concerned only with churches in the Russian Federation.



"Set your sights higher."



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